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A cross-linguistic register study of English and German pop lyrics

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The present contribution offers a cross-linguistic register study (Neumann 2016) of English and German pop lyrics, which constitute an understudied text type. It conceptualizes lyrics as a highly specific text type/register and tries to identify cross-linguistic commonalities and differences. As empirical base, it uses LYPOP (Werner 2021a) and the Songkorpus (Schneider 2020), two corpora that represent the lyrics of commercially highly successful pop songs in Anglophone and German contexts. Given the similar sociocultural functions and production circumstances of English and German lyrics, the study empirically assesses the starting hypothesis that large-scale linguistic overlap can be traced. While indeed cross-linguistic convergence is found especially for lexical patterns in terms of topic choice, the analysis also reveals a common property of conveying a conversational feel through lexicogrammatical means. However, given the differing typological make-up of the languages contrasted, fine-grained differences are found as regards the ways conversationality/informality is established in pop lyrics as a performed text type, for instance regarding contraction patterns in lexical and modal verbs. Further, it emerges that lyrics from both languages largely lack other highly characteristic informal/conversational items, such as false starts or hesitation markers. Given the scripted and edited production of the lyrics as well as the (as a rule) spatial and temporal distance between speaker and audience and the genuinely monologic/non-interactive nature of the discourse, it is suggested that such devices lack a communicative function and thus are absent. This finding can further be related to the concept of a "performance filter" (Werner 2021b) in the sense that only selected items associated with conversationality (or the language of immediacy *sensu* Koch/Oesterreicher, 2012) are (consciously) used to index informality in lyrics.

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